landscape and geologic changes. During my 5 years in California, I am indebted to the patient guidance provided by many well-qualified soil conservationists, engineers, range conservationists, and foresters. They influenced my development and appreciation for soil-plant-animal interrelationships.

The fall of 1968 found me in Battle Mountain, Nevada, as a soil survey party leader for the Lander County Area. By this time, I thought I knew it all, at least until I brought up the first bucket auger of soil in a greasewood flat. Not sure what I was looking at, I continued on to a shadscale community. Same problem, but a different soil. Frustration set in as I went back to the preliminary criteria for classifying soils. To make matters worse, I had no idea what the plants were in the area. I just knew they were different. E. A. (Ed) Naphan, state soil scientist, let me flounder around for a couple of months before he sent help. At the time, I did not appreciate his methods, but, in retrospect, it was one of the best things he ever did for me. Ed had a way of bringing the best out of you.

Ultimately, Eddie Spencer, state soil correlator, was sent to bring me around. Eddie went over and clarified a number of items dealing with Aridisols, Entisols, and Inceptisols. Then, it was off to the field. We first stopped at a borrow pit to examine a desert soil profile. Field examination revealed a number of cylindrical and round looking things. Eddie said, "The dog-dropping-looking things are durinodes." On comes the light, a lesson never forgotten. This event was to follow me, as I was called "Mr. Durinode" by some colleagues for my ability to find durinodes in various soil profiles. Eddie also provided a lesson in determining the various degrees of silica pan cementation. It was a good week and finally set me on the right path.

Leland Campsey and John Riel, range conservationists, arrived shortly thereafter to help put me on track with desert plant identification and Nevada range site concepts. Great Basin Landforms was being developed by F. F. (Fred) Peterson, at the University of Nevada, Reno. I was fortunate to work with him a number of times over the years. This allowed me to incorporate his suggestions and concepts into the soil mapping process. These concepts were to be one of the final keys to consistency in mapping Nevada soils.

Transferring to Elko, Nevada, five years later brought on new challenges. The area was totally different. It is comprised mainly of various sagebrush and woodland plant communities along with different kinds of landforms. Trying to figure out the soils, vegetation, geomorphic, and climatic relationships was quite interesting.

During this time, Steve Slusser and I were detailed to the pine forest part of

Humboldt County. This allowed the two of us to apply our knowledge to a mix of different landform and vegetative communities.

Not to be outdone by the old timers in soil survey, we would leave the office on Monday and return on Friday. We camped out at predetermined locations at the end of the day. One moonlit night, we were awakened by a flock of bats circling overhead. Fearing a potential rabid bat, we beat a hasty retreat to the trucks for the remainder of the night.

My promotion to soil correlator occurred in 1978 and I continued in that position until 1988 when I was assigned to the National Soil-Range Team. About this time, the Bureau of Land Management was gearing up for soil survey on public lands. The Nevada SCS Soil Survey Program was to play a lead role, in addition to our ongoing soil surveys. The workload increased, but the opportunity to work in almost all parts of the state was exciting.

During my tenure as soil correlator, the one feature I felt most positive about was the maintenance and refinement of our soil-vegetation-landform-climate concepts. These concepts brought consistency to the soil mapping process between individuals and across state or soil survey area boundaries.

There are a number of interesting experiences that I recall as a soil correlator and will share a few with you. One time on a field review in the Las Vegas area, we were field checking a soil type location. This soil had an extremely hard and thick petrocalcic horizon. The area was undergoing development for subdivision. A large crane was dropping a steel ball onto the petrocalcica horizon exposed in a trench. Continuous pounding was breaking the petrocalcic horizon into fragments. All I could think of was something an engineer once said, "Given enough time and money, you can manipulate a soil into anything you want. It is just a matter of economics."

Another time, we were on a field review in northern Elko County. It was a long trip back to Elko and there was one more soil to examine, as it was a new soil series. Being late in the day and not wanting to make another the trip back, we decided to finish the job at hand before heading back. Everything went well until it was time to check soil colors. By this time, it was getting a little dark, so the only alternative was to use the truck headlights to check the colors. Needless to say, I know a soil correlator that was the butt of a joke for some time.

Helicopters were commonly used on BLM soil surveys and were a boom to a soil correlator. This is especially so during field reviews and spot checks of soil mapping. That is, it was fun until a two seat Bell B2 that was flying a couple of folks the day before I was to fly encountered a problem. It seems the helicopter managed to lift about 25 feet when the supercharger quit,

dropping passengers and machine back to the ground. No harm was done to man or machine, but hearing about the encounter, I was a little apprehensive after that.

Another time, on a field review in eastern Humboldt County, we stopped at a soil type location that was coarse-silty and contained durinodes. Everything was dry and dusty. It happened that there were two, new soil scientists in the soil pit with me. We were bent over looking at some durinodes when a clod of soil fell into the pit creating a cloud of dust. We came up choking and covered with dust.

Last, but not least, this tale probably sums up what it takes to make a soil correlator. We were completing some soil mapping spot checks in eastern Elko County. As we drove along the trail, I was holding the soil maps and the identification legend trying to keep track of mapping as we went. Finally I spotted something that did not look right and asked the driver to stop. This got the best of Al Wasner, one of the soil survey party members. He asked, "You have never been here before so how did you know when to stop and what soil should be here?" I replied, "If you have a strong interest and a good handle on soil, vegetation, climate, geomorphic, and landform concepts, everything comes together and it's easy to spot discrepancies. That means — learn all you can from each discipline and then it's just a matter of putting all the pieces together."

In retrospect, if one had to do it all over again, I would do it again with very few minor adjustments. This was an exciting time in my life, full of challenge, and a tremendous opportunity to make good friends and work with some of the best professional soil scientists available.

# **Discovery**

Douglas J. Merkler

The slightest hint of a wind began to flow up the canyon as the cold morning air began to warm against the black rock in the late morning sunlight. Ed Naphan walked to the edge of the narrow canyon, breathed deeply, turned to me and said, "You can almost feel the primordial winds blowing through this

Ed Naphan . . . said, "You can almost feel the primordial winds blowing through this canyon."

canyon." And then he laughed, lit his cigarette, and walked with me the 40 or 50 feet back toward the others gathered around the shallow soil pit carefully dug on that cobbly basalt flow. It was 1979 and a preliminary review of the 2.2 million-acre Lahontan Environmental Statement

area in the Sehoo Mountains southeast of Fallon, Nevada, was underway. I do not believe I understood then what Ed had intended with his comment. I do not believe any of us, except for Ed, understood the adventure we were about to embark on, discovering and describing soils and vegetation in Nevada.

To meet the demanding objectives required in the newly contracted Order 3 soil surveys, a philosophy that soils should vary in association with landscapes, and that soil components could be distinguished in the same manner as climatic and vegetative components as they relate to the landscape, was promoted. Each region, valley, or mountain range contains a variety of soils, many of which are also encountered in other regions, but the distribution of soils will follow a definite repeatable pattern. This concept was important from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. Theoretically, soil distribution is often the key to answering many questions about soil formation. From a practical viewpoint, it is difficult and costly to prepare detailed maps of soil locations, which can vary in short distances; a practical tool was needed. Having studied under Dr. Fred Peterson in Reno, who had been working on his Landforms of the Basin and Range Province Defined for Soil Survey, it seemed hard to imagine one might take any other course of action. Fred's concepts were put into use even before his work was published in 1981. The seventh approximation of Soil Taxonomy had been published in a hardbound book and was in general use providing a solid taxonomic foundation. It was not until much later that I began to realize what a wonderful foundation this unique set of circumstances had provided all of us as we began what would become a career full of discovery in Nevada.

William Bryant Logan comments in his book, *Dirt, The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*, "Horizons are what make some people become soil scientists. They are that lovely." To describe a variety of soils and their profiles is to begin a process of developing a vocabulary, not of words or taxonomic categories,

but of fundamental relationships in nature. Hans Jenny has been quoted as saying, "A soil is a body in nature." The opportunity to describe 'a new body' in nature is not only a scientific privilege; in Nevada, it has been a requirement. Nevada has been, quite literally, the proving ground for many areas of soil classification. A flurry of new series concepts began to emerge, as the complexity of the Great Basin became apparent and observed. It must have been a similar situation for the biologists during the turn of the 20th century when C. Hart Merriam sent forth his army of biologists for a biogeographical reconnaissance of the western United States.

A certain amount of pride develops as one describes the horizons of a soil where the pebbles on the surface have been staring at the stars long enough to watch the cycles of precession pass like days, and realize that this is an undiscovered natural body that you will have to name. You can almost feel that primordial wind blowing.

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